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THE
TRYAL
OF

THOMAS WOOLSTON, B. D.

Sometime FELLOW of *Sidney College in Cambridge,*

On *TUESDAY* the Fourth of *MARCH*, 1729.

At the Court of *King's-Bench*, in *Guildhal,*

On Four several

INFORMATIONS,

F O R

Writing, Printing, Publishing, Four Blasphemous Books, *On the Miracles of Our Saviour;* with the Observations of the Council thereupon.

LONDON: Printed and DUBLIN Re-printed by James Hoey and George Faulkner, at the Pamphlet-Shop, in Skinner-Row, opposite the Tholsel, 1729.

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TH E Jury being Sworn to try this Issue, between Our Sovereign Lord the King and *Thomas Woolston*, Defendant. The Council for the King opened the Case to the Court, That *Thomas Woolston*, sometime Fellow of Sidney College in Cambridge, had wrote a Wicked and Blasphemous Book, which he caused to be Printed and Published, on the First of May last, Intituled, *A Discourse on the Miracles of our Saviour, &c.* Insinuating, That the Miracles done by Jesus Christ, might be done by the Power of Magick Art, to the Scandal of Our Holy Religion, and bringing into Contempt, the Life and Doctrines of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That he was once esteem'd as a Learned Gentleman, and a Clergyman, but thinking his Learning too great for him to remain unconsider'd, he fell into a Crime, which justly exposes him to the Censure of all good Christians, stating Our Saviour's Miracles as Romances, idle Tales and Rodomantadoes, and not an Evidence of his Divinity, but vile Absurdities, Incoherencies and Contradictions; and that notwithstanding the Defendant now maintains such Blasphemous Notions, he once enter'd into Orders, and consequently believed them, or pretended to believe the Scriptures, containing the Miracles of Our Saviour, as they are believed by all True Christians.

The King's Attorney General then took Notice to the Court and Jury, That this was the most Blasphemous Book that ever was Publish'd in any Age whatsoever, in which Our Saviour is compared to a Conjurer, Magician and Impostor, and the Holy Gospel, as wrote by the Blessed Evangelists, turn'd into Ridicule and Ludicrous Banter, the Literal Scope and Meaning wrested, and the Whole represented as idle Romance and Fiction; and to serve his Purpose in this Blasphemous Piece, he has quoted St. Austin as encouraging his Notions, as if that Father had said, *The Works which Jesus did, might have been done by Magick Art*; but as he had mistranslated the very Quotation he cites, it was presumed he did it chiefly to impose upon the World, since he being a Man of Learning, must know he varied from the Meaning and Words of the Latin, which he has placed in the Margin; for us he say, St. Austin said, *The Works of Jesus might have been performed by Magick Art*, St. Austin says, *Infidels might suggest such a Thing.*

MAY 9 1922

Mr.

Mr. Tuskin deposed, That he bought this First Book, *On the Miracles of our Saviour*, of Mr. Thomas Woolston, on the Second of May last, at his House in the Old-Tury, for which he gave him One Shilling.

Mr. Birch, the Councillor for the Defendant, said, He should not dispute that Mr. Woolston did not publish this Book, but he could not agree it was done with a Blasphemous Intent, to bring Our Religion into Contempt, but to put Our Religion upon a better Footing, and shew, That the Miracles of Our Saviour were to be understood in a Metaphorical Sense, and not as they were Literally Written; but this was answer'd, If Mr. Woolston's Intent was to do so, he would not have turn'd the Miracles of Our Saviour into Ridicule, and proceeded in so Ludicrous a Manner, as he has done, but to have endeavour'd to prove, They were not to be taken as they are Literally Wrote, by a Serious Discourse, and Sound Argument. The Councillor for the Defendant, said, There were several Passages in this Book, which shew'd the Author had no Intent to bring Our Religion into Disgrace, and those Passages being read, would show, as he said before, It was only to put Our Religion upon a better Footing, by discovering the Parts which are Allegorical; but here he was again answer'd, That what he had wrote, was too plain to be misunderstood; and if the Author of a Treasonable Libel, should write at the Conclusion, *God save the King*, it would not excuse him.

Part of this First Book being read, it appear'd, That his First Piece of False Reasoning, or rather Impious Ribaldry, was upon Our Saviour's *Driving out those who bought and sold Doves in the Temple*, and he there tells you, That he has read in some Modern Author, whose Name does not occur to his Memory, That it was, in his Opinion, the most stupendous Miracle that Jesus wrought, and in Truth, says he, it was a most astonishing One, if Literally True, and Jesus must appear more than a Man, he must put on an awful and most Majestick Countenance to effect it. It is hard, says he, How any one in the Form of a Man, and of a despised one too, (and we don't read that Jesus chang'd his Humane Shape,) with a Whip in his Hand, could execute such a Work, upon a great Multitude of People, who were none of his Disciples, nor had any Regard for him, supposing (says he) he could by his Divine Power, infuse a Panick Fear into the People, yet what was the Reason he was so eaten up with Zeal, against the Profanation of that House, which he himself came to destroy, and which he permitted, I may say command-ed to be filthily polluted not long after. He then endeavours to prove, by the Authority of the Fathers, that this is an Allegory, and concludes the Observation with Invectives and Insinuation, against our Clergy, as if he would maliciously bring into Contempt a Body of Men, of which he is not worthy to be a Member.

He next falls upon that Miracle of Our Saviour, of his casting the Devils out of the Possess'd, and permitting them to enter into the Herd of Swine, which thereupon ran down a Precipice, and were all choak'd in the Sea.

To Exorcise, or cast out Devils out of the Possess'd (says he) without considering the Nature of such a Possession, or the Nature and Power of the Devil, we'll allow to be not only a kind and beneficent Act, but a great Miracle; and then, be the Miracle as great as can be imagin'd, it is no more than what false Teachers, Workers of Iniquity, and even some

Some Artists among the Jews have done before ; consequently (says he) such a Work of Exorcism, in our Saviour, could be no proof of his Divine Authority. And if there was no more to be said against this Miracle, this is enough to set it aside, and to spoil the Argument of Jesus's Divine Power from it ; but he says, there are many Circumstances in the Story, literally consider'd, that would induce us to call the Truth of the Whole into Question. He then goes to reckon it an Absurdity, That the Possess'd should dwell among the Tombs, &c. and would fain insinuate, That there were no Swine in that Country, prophanely making as familiar with the Great Name of Jesus, as if he was a Ticket Porter, and seems to wonder how he escaped so well, as only being desired to depart out of their Coasts, saying, If any Exorcist, in this our Age and Nation, had pretended to expel the Devil out of one Possess'd, and permitted him to enter into a Flock of Sheep, the People would have said that he had bewitch'd both, and our Laws and Judges too, of the last Age, would have made him to swing for it ; and this too, he would save as an Allegory : but leaving that to Divines, his Impiety and Insolence is plain, and not Allegorical.

The next Charge against him, in the Information, is his abuse of that Part of Sacred History on our Saviour's Transfiguration on the Mount, and this, says he, is the darkest and blindest Story of the whole Gospel, which a Man can make neither Head nor Foot of, and he questions whether the Heads of any two thinking Doctors can agree about it. To say there is nothing in the Letter of this Story, we Believers must not, because St. Peter says, he was an Eye-witness of Jesus's Majesty, saw his Glory on the Mount, and heard the Voice out of the Cloud ; and under pretence of telling how Infidels will be prying into Christ's Life, he introduces St. Augustin, as countenancing his Infidelity, and says, That he owns, that the whole might be perform'd by Magick Art, and we know, says he, That in these our Days, some Juglers are strange Artists at the Imitation of a Voice, and to make as if it came from afar off, when it is utter'd close by us, and can cast themselves too into different Forms and Shapes, without a Miracle, to the Surprize and Admiration of the Spectators, and will have it, that this Transfiguration was only the Sunshine in Jesus Face, and speaks of Moses and Elias talking with Jesus in the Mount, with the utmost ludicrous Impiety.

The next Miracle which he falls upon, and is in the Charge against him, is surely the most loose and extravagant Discourse that ever was wrote by any other Pen than that of the Defendant ; it is on our Saviour's turning Water into Wine at the Marriage of Cana of Galile, on which his Observations are so monstrous and abominable, that the Relation will not bear mentioning, the whole being summ'd up to the Jury, without going out, they brought him in guilty of Writing, Printing, and Publishing the said Book.

The Jury were then sworn again, to try this Issue between Our Sovereign Lord the King, and Thomas Woolston, on a Second Book of his, entitled, *A Second Discourse on the Miracles of our Saviour, &c.* for Writing, Printing and Publishing the said Book, containing ludicrous Reflections on the Miracles of our Saviour, and vile Insinuations on the Life and Actions of Jesus Christ, which the Council for the King open'd as before ; shewing, That the Defendant Thomas Woolston, sometime Fellow of Sidney College in Cambridge, had in a Second

cond Book, &c. set forth those three Miracles of our Saviour, of his healing a Woman that was afflicted with an Issue of Blood Twelve Years; of his curing a Woman that labour'd under an Infirmitiy Eighteen Years; and of his telling the *Samaritan* Woman her Fortune (as he expresses it) of having had Five Husbands, and living then in Adultery with another Man, as so many Absurdities, Improbabilities and Incredibilities, and this in a Blasphemous and Ludicrous Manner.

The Council for the Defendant made the same Observations as he had done before, and then Mr. *John Custin* was call'd and swore, who said, he bought this Second Book of Mr. *Woolston* for One Shilling, part of the Book being read, it shew'd that Mr. *Woolston* set forth, that the Miracles of healing all manner of Bodily Diseases, which *Jesus* was justly fam'd for, are none of the proper Miracles of the *Messiah*, neither are they so much as a good Proof of hi Divine Authority to found a Religion.

That the literal Prophecy of many of the Miracles of *Jesus* as recorded by the Evangelists, does imply Absurdities, Improbabilities and Incredibilities, and consequently they either in whole, or in part, were never wrote as they are commonly believed now a-days, but are only related as prophetical and parabolical Narratives, as would be misteriously and more wonderfully done by him.

He then says, he will consider what *Jesus* means when he appeals to his Miracles, as to a Testimony and Witness of his Divine Authority, and to shew that he could not properly and ultimately refer to those he then wrought in the Flesh but to those mystical ones which he would do in the Spirit, of which those wrote in the Flesh, are but Types and Shadows; he then says, *Jesus* is suppos'd often miraculously to cure Lameness, but there is no Account of the Nature and Degree of the Lameness he cur'd, nor are we certain whether the Skill of a Surgeon or Nature itself could not have done the Work without his Help. If, says he, the Evangelist had told us of Men that wanted one or both their Legs (and such miserable Objects of Christ's Power and Compassion, were undoubtedly in those Days as well as in ours) and how *Jesus* commanded Nature to extend itself to the intire Reparation of such Defects; here would have been stupendous Miracles indeed, which no Sceptism or Infidelity it self could have cavill'd at, nor (says he) could I, nor the Fathers themselves have told how to Allegorise or make Parables of them; but there is no such Miracle Recorded of Christ, but as he says they are blindly and lamely reported, and he would treat on some Subjects, but he would forbear it at present, having no inclination to put the Clergy quite out of all Temper, for now he has them in a tollerable good Humour for Liberty, and he'll endeavour to keep them in it, and not disturb them by an hasty and unnecessary Provocation; for says he, who knows not, that the Clergy, like an untam'd Colt, that I have a mind to ride, may be apt to kick and winch, and may give me a fall before I come at the end of my Journey, to the Disappointment of my Readers; they shall therefore be gently handled and stroak'd till they are a little more inur'd to the Bit and Saddle, and for their Sakes will I postpone such Miracles as are most obnoxious to ridicule, and at present chuse the Three, that of almost any in the Gospel may be inoffensively treated on.

He then begins with the Miracle of *Jesus*'s healing a Woman diseas'd with an Issue of Blood Twelve Years; he seems very Angry with the Evangelists for not tel-

ling the Nature of this Distemper, and says, it might be only a little Bleeding at the Nose, or an Evacuation of the Blood by Urine, &c. and Insinuates as if an Infidel should ask the Question, that she was not so bad as she pretended, for she press'd into the Crowd, and that Jesus's curing her might be a Precipitation of her Death, by stopping the Emission of Blood, which discharg'd Nature of her Load of Humours, and brings in a vile Comparison of Moor the Apothecary, whom he prefers to the Evangelist ; and will have it, that the Woman was Cured by Conceit and Imagination, on her touching the Hem of Christ's Garment, and from the Words of our Saviour, *That Virtue had gone out of Him*, draws this Blasphemous Inference, *That Jesus's Virtue hung very loose on him*; and such likewise makes a Comparison of our Saviour's working Miracles, to the Pope's three *Miracles* when he was last at *Benevento*.

The Miracle of our Saviour's healing the Woman, who had an Infirmity eighteen Years and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up her self, &c. he treats after the same ludicrous Manner, calling her a drooping, stooping, vapourish Woman, full of Fancies of the Devil's Temptation over her ; and, when our Saviour laid his Hands on her, she might afterwards be of more cheerful Heart, erect Countenance, and freed from the whimsical Imagination of being Satan ridden ; take the Devil out of this Story, he says, there is nothing in it but a simple, melancholly, drooping Woman, and this too, he compares to the Pope's exorcising a Daemon out of a young Maid at *Benevento*; if says he, this Woman was about Fifty or Sixty when she first began to Droop, and the Devil got upon her Back, here had been Hope for a most stupendious Miracle, and our Divines might have asserted what no Body could have contradicted, that Jesus had made an old Woman not only under the Weight of Satan, but under the Burthen of 70 or 80 Years young again, and had restored her to the Health, Vigour and Beauty of one of Fifteen, &c. He then comes to the Woman of Samaria, and of our Saviour's telling her Fortune ; this Story he says, he thought once to transcribe at length, but he consider'd it was a long one, and would set his Readers a Laughing before they came to his Observations ; one of which is, that if such a broken elliptical and absurd Tale had been told of any other Impostor in Religion, the Wits of our Clergy had been at work to expose it plentifully ; and indeed says he, there's no need of much Wit to make this Tale nauseous and ridiculous to Vulgar Understanding ; The Samaritans he says, expected he would be a Conjuror and Fortune-teller, and wonders that the Gypsies from this Story, don't account themselves the genuine Disciples of Jesus, being indu'd with the like Gifts, and exercising no more Arts than he himself practis'd.

And the Men of *Sycra* he says, had but little Wit, or they had never stirr'd from their Homes to see such a Fortune-teller upon the Report of a poor Whore, but they had their Fortunes told too ; but he says, there is one Circumstance that looks very ill upon Jesus, and is enough to make him suspected for a Cheat, and that is, he seems to draw the Woman in by a Whiff to have her Fortune told, but he can say any thing.

The Jury consider'd this, and found him guilty as before. The Jury then being swore again, a third Information was pleaded against him, for publishing, writing, and printing a Third Book of *Our Saviour's cursing the Figtree*.

Looking upon the Letter of this not to be true, he says, this Miracle, upon the bare mention of it, appears to be such an absurd, foolish and ridiculous, if not malicious and ill-natur'd Act in Jesus, that he Questions whether for Folly and Absurdity it can be equall'd in any Instance of the Life of a reputed wise Man.

He tells us Jesus was Hungry it seems, and being disappointed of Figs, to the Satisfaction of his Appetite, curs'd the Fig-Tree, and goes on in a Manner as touching, saying, it was as foolishly and passionately done, as for another Man to throw the Chairs and Stools about the House, because his Dinner is not ready at a critical Time, or before it could be got ready for him.

He asks where was Judas his Steward and Caterer with his Bag of Victuals, as well as Money, and calls it poor Forecast and Management among them, or Jesus had never trusted to the uncertain Fruits of a Figtree, which he espy'd at a Distance, for his Breakfast, and proceeds in a Strain enough to chill the Blood of one who has the least Notions of his Saviour, tho' he endeavours to salve it up with an Allegory ; but the Council for the King observ'd, He could have no good in his Heart, who could let such Expressions come from under his Hand.

The next Miracle of Our Saviour, which he turns into Ridicule, is, Of his Healing of a Man of an Infirmitiy of Thirty Eight Years Duration, at the Pool of Bethesda, that had five Porches, in which lay a great Number of Impotent Folks, Blind, Halt, and Wither'd, waiting the Troubling of the Waters, upon the Descent of an Angel, who gave a Sanative Virtue to them, to the Curing of any one, be his Distemper of what kind soever, who first stepp'd down into them.

This whole Story, he says, is what Our Saviour calls a Camel of a monstrous Size, for Absurdities, Improbabilities, and Incredibilities, which our Divine, and their implicit Followers of these last Ages have swallowed without clearing, whilst they have been straining at Knots in Theology, and hesitating at frivolous and indifferent Things of the Church, of no Consequence ; and here he again prosecutes his Observations in a Ludicrous Manner, as before, and tells ye, The Man's Infirmitiy was more Laziness than Lame-ness, and Jesus only shamed him out of his pretended Illness, by bidding him to take up his Stool and walk off, and not lie any longer like a lazy Lubbard and Dissembler, among the Diseased, who were real Objects of Pity and Compassion. He then goes on to shew in his Way, That there was no Coherence between the History wrote by St John, and the other Evangelists, and says, That the best Conception that an Impartial Reader of the Gospel can Form of Jesus, is, That he was a tolerable good Natural Orator, and could handsomely Harangue the People off Hand, and was according to the Philosophy of the Times, a good Cabballist ; and his Admirers finding him endow'd with the Gift of Utterance, which was thought by them more than Humane, they fancied he must have the Gift of Healing too, and would have him to exercise it, which he did with Success, upon the Fancies and Imaginations of many, who magnify'd his Divine Power for it : Then he is so extravagant and wild, as to tell ye, That the Angel's Descent into the Pool, might be to wash himself, and clear off some bodily Defilement, or Heat, contracted in the Celestial Regions, that wanted Refrigeration, or Purgation in these Waters. Thus he di-
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sets himself with the Host of Heaven, and makes a Jest at that which all good Christians think of with Awe and Reverence; and its no wonder that he in this Book talks in an impudent and rude Manner to the Right Reverend Father in God the Lord Bishop of Litchfield, since he can behave in so preposterous a Manner to Christ, who bought him, if Christ can be said to purchase those who make a Mock at his Life and Miracles.

Of this Blasphemous Book, he was likewise found Guilty, both as the Author, Printer, and Publisher.

He had a Fourth Information pleaded against him, for Writing, Printing, and Publishing, a Fourth Book on Our Saviour's Miracles, and this Book appear'd to be more Base, Vile, and Blasphemous, than all the Rest; and he begins with Our Saviour's giving Sight to the Man who was born Blind, which in his Language, was done by the Means of Eye-Salve, made of Clay and Spittle; sometimes says he, we hear of Famous Chance Doctors, like Jesus, who by a Gift of God, Nature or Fortune, without any Skill in the Structure of the Eyes, have been very successful in the Cure of one Distemper or other incident to them.

Sir William Read, he tells ye, was no Scholar, yet ye cured his Thousands of Sore and Blind Eyes, and many of them too, to the Surprise and Astonishment of profess'd Surgeons and Physicians; and he questions whether he, or Jesus cured the greater Number; and comparing Jesus further, to Sir William Read, he says, That both met with great Numbers which were out of their Power; but thinking Sir William Read too great a Man to be held in Comparison with Jesus Christ, he again compares him to Moor the Quack Doctor; but the further we go in his Observations, he still appears the more Blasphemous; and what is still surprising, this very Infidel, for such a Man can surely Merit no better Epithet, would perswade you, He is a good Christian, and believes in Our Saviour, tho' in a different Manner from all True Believers.

He then falls again upon the Wedding at Cana in Galilee, and would fain insinuate, That Our Saviour was a Winebibber, or he would not have converted Water into Wine, when they had all enough; and he Impiously, and Blasphemously proceeds to tell you, He had a Cup in his Head, or he would not have talk'd so to his Mother.

Of this Blasphemous Book he was likewise found Guilty.

These, and such like Indignities, offer'd to the Holy Jesus, Our Blessed Saviour, the Author and Foundation of Our Hope, it's hop'd, will stir up all who profes Christ, and hope to be saved by his Death and Sufferings for Our Sins, to a lively Zeal for his Cause, and a Detestation of those who would bring into Contempt his Holy Gospel.

The Laws of God, as was observ'd by the Council, are a Part, and the Chief Part of the Laws of this Kingdom; and if a Man, who should write against our stated Laws, or but to turn them into Burlesque and Ridicule, cannot escape with Impunity, what can he expect, who shall strike at the Root of Christianity, and bring into Contempt the Author and Finisher of our Faith.